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GREGORY FORTH

Flores after floresiensis

Implications of local reaction to recent palaeoanthropological discoveries on an eastern Indonesian island

In a recent article (Forth 2005) I discussed possible implications for several sorts of anthropology of the discovery, on the eastern Indonesian island of Flores, of skeletal remains interpreted as a new species of Homo – *Homo floresiensis*. The discovery was, and remains, controversial, not least because the creature so classified, interpreted by the discovery team as an endemic dwarf descendant of *Homo erectus*, stood just over a metre tall and had a cranial capacity of just 380 cc, thus a brain about the size of a chimpanzee's. It had also survived until at least 12,000 BP, well within the period modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) were present in this part of Indonesia (Brown et al. 2004; Morwood et al. 2004). According to the counter-interpretation, most closely associated with the Indonesian anthropologist Teuku Jacob, the diminutive hominid is not a new species but was either a modern human suffering from microcephaly or a modern human dwarf or pygmy. Analysis of skeletal material from another eight individuals tends to confirm the discovery team's interpretation of a new, non-sapiens member of the genus Homo (Morwood et al. 2005), but disagreement over the nature of the hominid is likely to continue for some while yet.

Writing as a social/cultural anthropologist, a particular interest of my earlier paper was the way in which some of the palaeoanthropological discoverers, as well as other scientific commentators, had proposed a connection between *floresiensis* and a category of hairy hominoids recognized by Florenese villagers. Assuming that Florenese themselves might make such a connection, I raised the question of how news of *Homo floresiensis* could affect local representations such as *ebu gogo*, a population of wildmen claimed by the Nage people of central Flores to have existed in their region until several generations ago, when their ancestors exterminated them (Forth 1998a).

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More particularly, I asked whether the discovery might reshape local ideas to the extent that pre-*floresiensis* traditions would no longer be recognizable. Since an anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of the present article has taken this interest to mean that I view such local knowledge as 'pristine or authentic indigenous lore' that is not socially or culturally 'constructed', I should perhaps emphasize that this is not my view – at least if by 'construction' is meant processes of shaping and informing rather than complete fabrication or invention. What I was concerned with, and continue to be, are ways anthropological, or in this case palaeoanthropological, knowledge may – or may not – impinge upon forms of local knowledge.

During a two-and-a-half month trip to Flores between May and July 2005, I was able to investigate these issues, both in the Nage region (where *ebu gogo* reputedly once lived) and elsewhere on the island where one encounters local representations of hairy hominoids, including the Manggarai region of western Flores, where *floresiensis* was discovered. On the whole, my impression is that news of the discovery has had rather less influence than might have been predicted. At the same time, investigating why this may have been so revealed differences between local categories and what might be conceived as their palaeoanthropological counterparts which should be of interest to, among others, social anthropologists.

Accounting for what appears to have been a minimal impact of the palaeontological find are several factors. First, during my entire stay on Flores I came across few people who had actually heard about the discovery. This should not be surprising, as communications are poor on Flores, especially for villagers living some distance from the few towns – in other words, the people most familiar with, and genuinely interested in, representations such as the hairy hominoids Nage call *ebu gogo*. Outside of the towns, very few people have regular access to television.[1] And while there are two newspapers that circulate with some regularity (*Flores Post* and *Pos Kupang*), I encountered few villagers who had read press reports concerning the *floresiensis* discovery or, if they had, could recount their contents. Especially worth mentioning is the claim by people in the Nage village of 'Ua, whose forbears are specifically recognized as the exterminators of *ebu gogo*, that they knew nothing of the skeleton unearthed in Manggarai. This was the case even though, early in 2005, 'Ua had been visited by a film crew from the American television network CBS. Concerning the discovery of *floresiensis* and its possible connection with *ebu gogo*, the film was aired in April as a segment of the American weekly news documentary 'Sixty Minutes'. The 'Ua villagers thought that the television crew's interest in them centred entirely

[1] Although the story would certainly have received some mention in news programmes on national television, I was unable to discover whether reports of *Homo floresiensis* were carried on local radio.

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on the legend of *ebu gogo* and the cave named Lia Ula (not to be confused with Liang Bua, the Manggarai cave where the remains of *Homo floresiensis* were excavated). The cave is located about a kilometre upslope of their oldest village, and is where the *ebu gogo* are supposed once to have lived. Evidently, the 'Ua folk did not appreciate the value that westerners place on material evidence such as bones and stones, by contrast to legends and other local narratives which, being difficult to verify, the same westerners tend to consider as unreliable – the popularity of 'urban legends' (that is, ones told by westerners) notwithstanding. The CBS film may have been noteworthy in the way it juxtaposed material (palaeontological) and narrative evidence, but the former had to emerge before the latter received any attention at all.

In addition to the news not having reached the majority of Florenese, or not having been received in a comprehensible form, a second reason why *Homo floresiensis* appears not to have significantly recast images like *ebu gogo* concerns a palpable reluctance among people who had heard of the find to link it with local traditions. While 'Ua people were as confident as ever about the truth of the story of *ebu gogo*, several other Nage men expressed a scepticism which, perhaps ironically, seemed to exceed that of some western scientific commentators. Why, they asked rhetorically, should one expect *Homo floresiensis* to be connected with *ebu gogo*, when the former is supposed to have died out thousands of years ago (and in a quite different part of Flores), whereas the *ebu gogo*, according to local tradition, survived in the Nage region until just a couple of hundred years ago? The men were further sceptical about the veracity of the legend of *ebu gogo*, in a way that contrasted with everything I had recorded, partly from these same informants, during previous visits. Specifically, the suggestion was that *ebu gogo* may be nothing more than a 'folktale' (Indonesian *dongeng*), a possibility indicated, as one man pointed out, by local disagreement about details of the tradition. Since this scepticism was encountered mainly among people living in or near the main Nage village of Bo'a Wae, I suspect it may in part be motivated by local rivalry coupled with some resentment at the attention the 'Ua people had received, especially from the American television crew. Nevertheless, it does suggest a change effected by the discovery of *floresiensis*, albeit a minor one. It is also a change of a kind somewhat different from what might have been expected, insofar as, rather than reinforcing or extending a local tradition, the discovery has caused some people to doubt it.

Among more educated and urban Florenese, I encountered other possible reasons for not connecting *Homo floresiensis* and *ebu gogo*. Most people in this category with whom I raised the issue were either Roman Catholic priests or others directly associated with the Church, or they were people educated in Catholic schools and seminaries. Although thoroughly opportunistic, my sample was thus not so unrepresentative of educated people generally, on an island whose population is more than 90 per cent Catholic.

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Two or three intertwined strands of opinion were discernible among this group. One is the view that, rather than reflecting a new species, what has come to be called 'Homo floresiensis' is of a piece with human remains uncovered in the 1950s, in Liang Bua (the later site of *floresiensis*'s discovery) and other caves of western Flores, by the Dutch missionary archaeologist Theodor Verhoeven, SVD. Dating from 4000 to 3000 BP and revealing individuals of relatively short stature with large teeth and indications of skeletal robusticity, these materials were interpreted by Verhoeven (1958) as reflecting an ancient 'proto-negrito' substrate among the human population of Flores. This essentially is the interpretation of the new Liang Bua skeleton, the type specimen of *Homo floresiensis*, advanced by the Indonesian palaeoanthropologist Teuku Jacob (1967), whose doctoral dissertation includes an analysis of Verhoeven's findings and an elaboration of his proto-negrito theory. Jacob (1967:96) generally concurs with the characterization of the prehistoric population discovered by Verhoeven as 'proto-negrito'; he also describes it as 'pygmy' or 'pygmoid', even while noting that the group was not sufficiently short to qualify as 'dwarf'. But there is a particular twist to the recent Florenese rejection of *floresiensis* as a new species of Homo. Florenese Catholics, and especially seminarians, obviously view the priest, Verhoeven, as one of their own. One could even go so far as to say that they regard Verhoeven's discoveries and interpretations, rather possessively, if not as local Catholic science then as a significant part of their own scientifically informed understanding of the people and history of Flores. The interpretation of *Homo floresiensis* as something very new, indeed as a new species, is perceived by this group as definitely an outsider's view. What is more, while the discovery team comprised Indonesians and other nationalities, educated Florenese, and especially Church officials, consistently identified the team with its Australian members and more particularly with one of its leaders, the Australian archaeologist Michael Morwood.

In addition to what might be called the 'religious' dimension of Florenese opinion on *floresiensis*, therefore, it is not difficult to discern a strong dose of nationalism. Describing Morwood and his fellow-nationals as 'scientific terrorists' (mainly, it seems, because it was Australian members of the team, rather than Indonesians, who announced the discovery to the media), a critical attitude specifically towards 'Australians' is also apparent in several pronouncements of Professor Jacob (who derives from Aceh, in northern Sumatra, and who, incidentally, is not a Catholic). As has been widely reported, Jacob has interpreted the type skeleton of *Homo floresiensis* as belonging to a microcephalic human dwarf, although he has more recently suggested that the diminutive female specimen was the pygmy ancestress of modern Manggarai people whom he also identifies as pygmies. I encountered versions of this view – that *floresiensis* was genealogically continuous with local humans – among educated Florenese, some of whom wanted to claim that

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the interpretation of the find as a new species had therefore been unequivocally disproved. To paraphrase one opinion: the skeleton dubbed 'Homo floresiensis' reflects nothing more than the fact that the modern population of Flores is made up of short, including very short, individuals as well as taller people; they are all equally human and Florenese, and not members of different species. What one appears to confront here is an ideological reluctance to countenance an interpretation of human (or hominid) remains on the island that threatens modern Florenese unity – a threat which perhaps takes on a political relevance in the present era of 'regional autonomy', when Flores as a whole is being promoted as a natural unit of governance.[2]

Similar views are discernible among a wider group of interested Florenese. Stated most simply, inhabitants of Flores are able to appreciate a creature named 'Flores man' (or in Indonesian *manusia Flores*, a term used for example in the Indonesian newspaper *Kompas* (*Kampung Orang Katai* 2005)) as an ancient inhabitant of their island only insofar as the figure can be understood as being specifically 'human' (Indonesian *manusia*) and, more particularly, as a distant human ancestor.[3] It is not difficult to see why people would be disinclined to identify *Homo floresiensis*, considered as a possible ancestor, with figures like the Nage *ebu gogo*. For Nage describe *ebu gogo* as hairy wildmen who were not fully human, or were at best ambiguously human, and thus definitely not like themselves, and who moreover are supposed to have survived, as a separate population, until just a few generations ago. Relevant here is the essentially descriptive and non-evolutionary nature of Nage and other Florenese ethnozoological knowledge, particularly in regard to how relations among animal categories are conceived. While this knowledge allows for a hypothetical transformation of one animal kind into another in the course of a single life cycle (Forth 1998b), it does not recognize the possibility of humans deriving, over long periods of time, from non-humans. Thus, to the extent that they are considered non-human, or imperfectly human, *ebu gogo* cannot be conceived even as distant relatives – and nor, for that matter, can monkeys or apes. As this last qualification may suggest, Nage draw a sharp distinction between humans (*kita ata*) and animals (*ana wa*), and like many people do not accept the modern zoological notion that humans are a kind of 'animal'.[4]

[2] In the context of 'regional autonomy', a national policy transferring power to Indonesian provinces and regencies to determine their political and economic development, it has even been suggested that Flores island, currently comprising a series of regencies within the province of East Nusa Tenggara, should become a separate province, in part because of its overwhelming Catholicism.

[3] This identification of *Homo floresiensis* as an ancestor was especially clear from an issue of a tourist newspaper I came across in Bali in May 2005. Entitled 'Flores Paradise', the paper explicitly describes the hominid as an 'ancestor' of modern Florenese.

[4] Forth 2004. Nage *kita ata*, 'human being', is composed of the third person plural inclusive pronoun, *kita* (the 'we' which includes the addressee) and *ata*, denoting 'people' in a generic sense which includes human outsiders.

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It may be negative reaction to the suggestion that 'Flores man', and thus a Florenese ancestor, was one and the same as a population of hairy, cultureless, and dim-witted wildmen, that has apparently inclined some Nage recently to deny the historical reality and natural status of *ebu gogo*, and to suggest that these beings may have been nothing more than a fairytale. They may of course well be correct. But from an anthropological perspective, much of the controversy can be traced to miscommunication grounded in ambiguity regarding the meaning of 'human' (or 'man', as in 'Flores man', or Indonesian 'manusia Flores'). For palaeoanthropology, this largely reduces to the question of whether 'Homo' (as in 'Homo floresiensis') means 'human', or whether 'human' (and humanity) is to be identified exclusively with *Homo sapiens*. Florenese opinion, as I have indicated, supports the equation of humanity with fully modern humans.

Nevertheless, one might yet have thought that Nage would have welcomed a scientific discovery which seemed to confirm an aspect of their own local history. During the two decades in which I have known them, I have often found Nage people appreciative of modern scientific findings that appear to corroborate their own traditions. One example is a linking of Stegodon remains found in the So'a Basin, just to the northwest of Nage territory, with animals described in myth (which, according to one version, were some sort of autochthonous buffalo). Another is an identification of geological knowledge concerning changes in sea level and the emergence of volcanoes with aspects of creation mythology, and with the wisdom of a famous Nage shaman, now deceased, who spoke of a time when the Nage volcano, Ebu Logo, did not exist. What is more, despite the small group of (possibly new) sceptics mentioned above, Nage do indeed adduce material evidence – described with the Indonesian term *bukti* – in support of the historical veracity of the legend of *ebu gogo*. Apart from the existence of the cave where the *ebu gogo* are supposed to have lived, this evidence includes black marks on the mountain wall outside the cave, taken to be traces of the fire set to exterminate the creatures, and bone fragments reputedly removed from the cave, the whereabouts of which are no longer known. Yet for Nage this 'evidence' seems in itself to be sufficient substantiation their own representations. There is also a question of its necessity, the testimony of forbears who have passed on the knowledge over several generations being at least as important as are material proofs. In addition, the history of *ebu gogo* is a legend which, as it were, belongs to the Nage, or more specifically to the people of 'Ua village. This ownership, and local specificity, weighs against any inclination to link the local hominoids with creatures inhabiting Manggarai, another, ethnolinguistically distinct part of the island, thousands of years before *ebu gogo* was rendered extinct – and moreover with a palaeoanthropological story told not by Florenese, but by foreigners.

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As it concerns possible local correlates of *Homo floresiensis*, a reluctance to connect local knowledge with scientific knowledge – which as should already be obvious is by no means completely devalued by Florenese – is also encountered in the Manggarai region, where the palaeontological discovery was made.[5] At the same time, attempts by Indonesian journalists and other media-savvy Indonesians to link *floresiensis* with certain hairy figures recognized by Manggarai may have found a readier reception in this region. Consistent with this are cultural differences between Manggarai and Nage, and particularly the existence of Manggarai myths concerning hirsute individuals who directly transform into human ancestors.

One journalistic attempt to connect *floresiensis* with local ancestors has focused on the male ancestor of a clan in the Cibal region of Manggarai, named Empo Paju La'e. According to a well-known legend, Empo Paju was a man covered in hair who lived in a forest cave, hunted wild pigs, and ate his food raw. After encountering female villagers whom he subsequently married, he learned the use of fire. In fact, his first contact with fire caused all his hair to fall off, thus revealing him to be a fully human being. It is however telling that every version of the myth I recorded, half a dozen in all, described Empo Paju as being 'big and tall'. (Also noteworthy is the common idea in central Flores, that the earliest ancestors were giants, yet another factor that may disincline Nage to identify the short *ebu gogo* with their own forbears.) By contrast, Indonesian media reports citing the tradition of Empo Paju (for example, *Hobbit of Flores* 2005:30 in *Tempo*), describe Paju as physically small or short, and thus as the probable ancestor of both *floresiensis* and similarly short modern day Manggaraians.

Despite this seemingly crucial difference in size, the *Tempo* article describes the identification of Empo Paju with *Homo floresiensis* as one made by Manggarai villagers themselves. If this is correct, then they have evidently been able to do so not only because they understand the newly discovered 'Flores man' as indeed a 'man' (which is to say a human), but also because ancestral figures like Empo Paju are regarded, despite their originally hirsute and cultureless condition, as also being essentially human.[6]

[5] One man who rejected possible connections between *Homo floresiensis* and figures from local lore was Téras villager Hendrikus Bandar, at the time custodian of Liang Bua cave. When I spoke to him in June 2005, Bandar drew a sharp distinction between creatures like *floresiensis*, which he described as the objects of 'archaeological research' (Indonesian *penelitian purbakala*), and characters that belong to local history or tradition (*sejarah*). This is not to say that he regarded local tradition as any less important or meaningful; he simply appeared reluctant in principle to connect – one might say confuse – this kind of knowledge with the findings of scientific research.

[6] The earliest ancestors of the Kei islanders are similarly depicted as 'wild savages' (Dutch *woeste wilden*) who lived like animals in the forest (Geurtjens 1921:83), but this report gives no indication of their having been hairy or in any other way physically different from their modern descendants.

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If not manifestly human at the outset, such hairy characters are recognized as persons who, in an immediate, mythical and non-evolutionary metamorphosis, became human upon forging relations with other, already human, forbears. Another example of such linkage concerns a story broadcast on the internet by a Manggarai civil servant named Willy Grasias. In this story, which was subsequently taken up by Indonesian newspapers (see Fointuna 2004), Mr. Grasias connects *floresiensis* with a mythical character named Reba Ruek, whom he represents as a small, hairy man who lived long ago in Liang Bua cave. A version of the tale was recently related in *Tempo* (*Hobbit of Flores* 2005:43-4), where it is credited to residents of the village of Téras, located close to Liang Bua. Yet with surprising consistency, Manggarai people I spoke to about Grasias's article, including people living in Téras, either stated that they had never heard the tale before, or of Reba Ruek, or they denied its validity, claiming that Reba Ruek was not a hairy hominoid and that the character has no traditional association with Liang Bua. It would seem, therefore, that this story of Reba Ruek, like the depiction of Empo Paju as short, may largely be a recent invention, inspired by the palaeoanthropological interpretation of remains found in Liang Bua as reflecting a small hominid, depicted in one widely distributed visual reconstruction as somewhat hirsute.[7]

Similarly connecting *Homo floresiensis* with figures of local lore, in fact ones reputed still to survive in the Lio region of eastern Flores, was a report that appeared in the British newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, within a few days of the scientific articles detailing the discovery of the new hominid in western Flores (Shears 2004). One issue I raised in my earlier paper (Forth 2005:16-7) concerned possible effects on Lio representations of the *Mail*'s reporter showing pictures of ancient hominids to local people. This too is a matter I was able to investigate during the following summer (2005), when I was able to speak to all of the Florenese mentioned in the *Daily Mail* article, several of whom I had previously met in 2003. For the most part, their stories, all concerning sightings of reputedly hominoidal creatures still living in this part of Flores, were rather different from what was reported in the British tabloid. Since it is unlikely in the extreme that anyone on Flores reads the *Daily Mail*, it may be assumed that what they told me was not influenced by its contents (which, I should perhaps add, is not to say that the information I received was any more factual than what the *Mail*'s reporter was told). How their statements may have been affected by visual materials shown them is another matter. However, contrary to my previous impression, these almost certainly did not include the by now

[7] Described as a generic term, *reba ruek* comprises *reba*, referring to a 'handsome young man', and *ruek*, meaning 'small'. Apparently, it is the small size and youthful appearance of the character that have motivated the identification with *Homo floresiensis*. On the other hand, 'handsome', by Florenese as well as western standards, hardly fits a hairy figure with the simian features shown in reconstructions of *floresiensis*.

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well-known graphic reconstruction of the new hominid by Peter Schouten, which appeared in numerous newspapers after the discovery of *Homo floresiensis* was announced on 28 October 2004. So far as I could discover, the pictures were textbook illustrations of other fossil hominids. Moreover, it seems, only a few people were shown these, and no one was given copies. How much people who did see the pictures may have accurately remembered seven or eight months afterwards is a matter about which I do not care to speculate.[8]

While the *Daily Mail* article endeavoured to connect *Homo floresiensis* with reputedly extant non-humans, not only Indonesian journalists and some local Florenese, but several palaeoanthropologists as well have identified the hominid as a biologically modern human. As noted, the main palaeoanthropological protagonist has been Teuku Jacob. After appropriating the type skeleton for several months and later returning it, damaged, to the Indonesian National Archaeology Institute in Jakarta, in April of 2005 Professor Jacob visited villages near Liang Bua and measured the inhabitants. On the basis of this anthropometrical exercise, Jacob then announced the existence of local communities composed largely of 'pygmies' (see *Kampung Orang Katai* 2005; *Hobbit of Flores* 2005:26-7). These, Professor Jacob has claimed, are the descendants of the diminutive individual unearthed in Liang Bua, whom he also considers to have been a modern human who happened to suffer from microcephaly. As the results of Professor Jacob's investigations have yet to be presented in a scholarly journal, it would be unfair to comment on this evidence or the argument to which it has been adduced. Nevertheless, it may be mentioned that Manggarai people I spoke with were mostly doubtful about the existence of large numbers of very short people in their region (the most famous of whom is one Yohanes Dak, a man who stands 1.2 metres tall, and is by now something of a media celebrity in eastern Indonesia). There are very short people, they noted, but they only occur in a few families, are not otherwise physically distinct, and rather than composing separate communities are found in various parts of Manggarai. As this local denial may suggest, Jacob's claims regarding pygmies may, ironically, be perceived by some Florenese in the same way as the discovery team's interpretations of *Homo floresiensis* as a distinct species – namely, as an attempt to attach significance to local physical differences, which they are inclined to reject.

[8] I am grateful to Peter Schouten (personal commmunication, 8-12-2005) and Bert Roberts (personal communication, 12-12-2005), a member of the team that discovered *Homo floresiensis*, for providing information regarding when Schouten's illustration was made available to science journalists. As indicated by his signature in the guest-book of a museum in Ledalero, near Maumere, the *Mail*'s writer visited this part of Flores on 29 October 2004. He may have arrived in Flores at an earlier date but, at any rate, I was told on good authority that he spent just two days in the region to which his report refers. The Schouten illustration was first made available to a select group of science journalists on 25 October, and was later available on the internet. Quite apart from other factors, however, internet access on Flores island is extremely limited and is often unreliable.

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A final example of possible local effects of the palaeontological discovery pertains not to Manggarai, but to Nage, the region once inhabited by *ebu gogo*. On 6 December 2004, an Australian newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, reported that a female wildman – indeed, an *ebu gogo* – had been captured some three weeks previously somewhere near the main Nage village of Bo'a Wae (Forth 2005:17). As might be expected, the report was quite inaccurate, and appeared to have stemmed from an Australian visitor's misunderstanding of an incident related to him by a Bo'a Wae elder named Eperardus Dhoi Léwa. Yet, as I learned from Dhoi Léwa and numerous other Nage besides, there was indeed a rumour circulating in late 2004 and early 2005. This concerned not a creature captured near Bo'a Wae, or anywhere else in the Nage region, but an infant hominoid (of unspecified sex) caught in a trap set for wild pigs by a man of Namu, a remote settlement 30 kilometres (as the crow flies) to the northwest of Nage. In mythological terms, it may be significant that Namu is one of the places Nage mention as a possible refuge of two *ebu gogo* that managed to escape the extermination of their group perpetrated some hundreds of years ago by the villagers of 'Ua. In addition, Nage have for many years been telling stories about encountering people in Namu during hunting expeditions, whose physical features suggest (to them) that they might be descendants of the *ebu gogo* refugees.

This is not the place to review all variants of the rumour or to discuss its possible derivation or mode of transmission. It is certainly not the first story of this sort recorded in eastern Indonesia. It may however be more than coincidence that in September and October 2004, the Nage region was visited by members of the *Homo floresiensis* discovery team wishing to learn more about Lia Ula, the cave in which *ebu gogo* are supposed to have resided before their extermination by the 'Ua folk. Apart from the possible link in Nage legend between Namu and *ebu gogo*, it is unclear why the setting of this particular rumour should have been Namu, a region in which the name *ebu gogo* is not even known. Nor is it clear where the rumour started. On the other hand, one variant of the tale I recorded in the Dhére Isa district, to the northeast of Bo'a Wae, had it that a hairy creature had been captured about this time not in Namu, but on the northern slopes of the Ebu Lobo volcano, thus in the general vicinity of Bo'a Wae and Lia Ula cave. Tales describing the capture of hominoids are not new in Flores. In fact, the Namu story can be understood as an instance of a genre found in various parts of Indonesia, the first recorded mention of which may be William Marsden's report (1783:35) of a hairy hominoid (named, apparently coincidently, as '*gugu*') reputedly captured in southern Sumatra in the eighteenth century.[9] But regardless of

[9] Such stories also find their way into Indonesian newspapers. A story which appeared in *Kompas* in September 1996 told how a villager on the island of Sumbawa had captured two infant specimens of a bipedal, hairy apelike creature which, unable to eat cooked food offered to them, did not live long.

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the story's probable precedents, it is quite possible that news of people looking for, and indeed discovering, a primitive creature in Manggarai served in the present case as a catalyst for a capture tale variously connected with Nage (the homeland, so to speak, of *ebu gogo*) and with Namu, a region which, significantly perhaps, borders on Manggarai.

Perhaps the main demonstration of this brief discussion is how the effects of information deriving from one system of knowledge (in this case, palaeoanthropology) on another, quite different knowledge system (local traditions, in some instances bearing on matters of folk zoology) are likely to be complex and difficult to anticipate. In the present case, one source of 'miscommunication' evidently concerns the definition of 'human' and 'humanity'. As is ultimately consistent with the non-evolutionary character of their folk zoology, Florenese seem quite clear about this: 'human' means physically modern humans like themselves; and even if their ancestors were initially hairy (as for example was the Manggarai ancestor Empo Paju), they were still, essentially, human. By contrast, anthropologists are much less clear about the distinction of human and non-human – and because of evolutionary theory and the (potential) distinction between metaphysical 'human' and taxonomic 'Homo', in a sense they do not have to be. Thus, it is possible to talk for example of 'Java man', or *Homo erectus*, and still deny that the chronospecies were fully 'man' (which is to say, humans) or that 'Homo' implies humanity in the exact sense. As much as anything, it is this disparity between palaeoanthropological and local Florenese definitions of 'human' that accounts for the difference in understandings of what sort of creature *Homo floresiensis* might have been.

How palaeoanthropologists distinguish *Homo sapiens* from other hominid species is of course quite another matter, and one which bears on the disagreement between Professor Jacob and the discovery team. On this sort of issue I am not qualified to comment. I will however conclude with observations that suggest how palaeontological history can repeat itself. In the 1920s and 1930s, in another part of Indonesia, colonial interest became focused on the possible existence of a hairy hominoid not entirely different from the Nage *ebu gogo*: the *orang pendek* of Sumatra. Palaeontologists and zoologists at the time tended to dismiss the *orang pendek* as an artefact of native fantasy (see especially Dammerman 1924). However, in May of 1932 Sumatran hunters, acting indirectly on a request from a Dutch administrator, produced what they claimed to be a skeleton of an infant *orang pendek* (or rather an *orang letjo*, another name for the creature) which they had shot. This later turned out to be a hoax, a doctored leaf monkey. Yet for a time, the experts, mostly contrary to their previous opinions, appeared to find the specimen credible, even while they disagreed about the exact nature of the specimen that had been killed. One such figure was Eugène Dubois, the famous discoverer, just forty years previously, of the remains of what he

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called *Pithecanthropus erectus*, eventually redesignated as *Homo erectus*. Prior to 1932, Professor Dubois had claimed that the *orang pendek* was nothing but a sunbear,[10] or perhaps an orang-utan.[11] Yet now that a skeleton of an *orang pendek* had reputedly been produced, and moreover was not at all bearlike, Dubois claimed that the *orang letjo* appeared to be a 'human being of a dwarf race' ('een mensch [...] van een dwergras'; *Orang pendek* 1932). As a secondary possibility, he suggested that it could yet turn out to be a sort of gibbon. What Dubois was most concerned to establish was that the *orang pendek* could not represent a transitional form such as his *Pithecanthropus*; such things could exist only in the distant past. Hence, if the creature were a hominid, it had to be *Homo sapiens*.

While there are obvious differences, the parallels with the case of *Homo floresiensis* are clear enough. Both Dubois and Jacob interpret as *Homo sapiens* new evidence which challenges not just existing interpretations of older evidence but, in quite a radical way, established theory. Professor Jacob's claim, expressed in virtually the same terms as Dubois', is that what some would call *Homo floresiensis* was a pygmy human (Dubois' term 'dwergras', it may be noted, is barely distinguishable from Jacob's 'pygmy' and is not much different from the concept of 'negrito'). The type specimen, Jacob has argued, is not a primitive hominid, but a recent albeit pathological and diminutive forbear of modern Florenese. The most important difference of course is that the *orang pendek* skeleton turned out to be a fake. *Homo floresiensis* can hardly be a fake. But the exact nature of the creature, and the controversy to which it has given rise, are matters that are likely to exercise anthropologists of various sub-disciplinary affiliations for some time to come.

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[10] E. Dubois to L.C. Westenenk, 1-7-1928, in: Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Collectie L.C. Westenenk, nummer toegang 2.21.205.71, included in L. Coomans de Ruiter, 'De stand van het orang pendek vraagstuk', 1929.

[11] Commenting on a reputed sighting of *orang pendek* by a sergeant-major in the topographical service named Van Esch, Dubois concluded that an orang-utan was the probable subject of the European's observation (*Het Handelsblad*, 20-9-1927).

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about the ancestral figure in the vicinity of Liang Bua sometime before 2004. An earlier version of the present paper was delivered as a research seminar in the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, University of Leiden, on 28 November 2005.

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